

Don't SLAM the Hatch



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The dangers of naval aviation, especially flight itself, are continuously addressed during shop training, safety stand-downs, and maintenance-meeting passdowns. We must remember and apply operational risk management below decks, as well as on the flight deck and in the air.

It was midnight on USS *Enterprise*, and flight ops finally were over. I had beaten the other troubleshooters off the deck as I headed to the line shack. It was cold outside, typical of the North Atlantic in March, and clouds obscured all moonlight. The plane captains came down to get their tie-down chains, which were hanging in the passageway just inside the catwalk. They opened the shop door so they could see in the black-painted space, because the red darken-ship light outside our space was not working.

Being cold and wanting to maintain darken-ship, I told the PCs to shut the door. They grumbled about their flashlights not working, so I rose to secure the door. The door came open again, so I slammed it shut and dogged it down.

Unknown to me, an AM3 plane captain had put his hand on the door's knife-edge. I heard his scream and quickly opened the door to find the AM3 holding his hand; his middle finger had been severed just below the nail. I treated him for shock and escorted

him to medical, but the doctors were unable to reattach his finger. This unfortunate incident cost him not only a finger: he had surgery, spent a week recuperating, and had only limited use of his right hand for several weeks.

Looking back on the events leading to this unfortunate mishap, I found a few areas where ORM should have been applied. Each could have prevented the loss of my shipmate's finger and avoided a heavy burden on my conscience.

First, the red light in the passageway had been out since we left port. I should have followed through on the numerous trouble calls made about the light. The second was my haste in getting the door closed so I could warm up. I could have taken time to help the PCs complete their task and get out of the cold more quickly.

I never realized the harm that can be done by simply closing a door. How many times have you reached for a door and had it hit you on the hand, or had the handle strike you as it was dogged down? I always will live with the fact that had I changed one link in that chain of events, my shipmate would not have lost his finger.

We all need to be cautious on the flight deck, but ORM doesn't stop when flight ops are secured. It's just as critical below decks. ☺